

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2015-2016 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 4 and 6, 2016

St. John Passion

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach

CONDUCTED BY
MANFRED HONECK

STAGED & DIRECTED BY
SAMUEL HELFRICH

MARTIN LATTKE, TENOR (EVANGELIST)
PAUL ARMIN EDELMANN, BASS (CHRISTUS)
SUNHAE IM, SOPRANO
ANDREY NEMZER, COUNTERTENOR
THOMAS COOLEY, TENOR
LUCAS MEACHEM, BARITONE
AMELIA D'ARCY, SOPRANO (ANCILLA)
JONATHAN MACDONALD, TENOR (SERVUS)
ALEXANDER ELLIOT, BARITONE (PILATUS)
JEFFRY KLEFSTAD, BASS (PETRUS)

MENDELSSOHN CHOIR OF PITTSBURGH
MARIA SENSI SELLNER, ACTING MUSIC DIRECTOR

LIGHTING DESIGN BY
ERIC SOUTHERN

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
LAUREN HUGHES

REHEARSAL PIANIST
RODRIGO OJEDA & KAREN ROETHLISBERGER VERM

PART I

1. Chorus: Herr, unser Herrscher
- 2a. Jesus ging mit seinen Jüngern
- 2b. Chorus: Jesum von Nazareth
- 2c. Jesus spricht zu ihnen
- 2d. Chorus: Jesum von Nazareth
- 2e. Jesus antwortete
3. Choral: O große Lieb
4. Auf daß das Wort erfüllet würde
5. Choral: Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich
6. Die Schar aber und der Oberhauptmann
7. Aria: Von den Stricken meiner Sünden
8. Simon Petrus aber folgte Jesu Nach
9. Aria: Ich Folge dir gleichfalls
10. Derselbige Jünger war dem Hohenpreister bekannt
11. Choral: Wer hat dich so geschlagen
- 12a. Und Hannas sandte ihn gebunden
- 12b. Chorus: Bist du nicht seiner Jünger einer
- 12c. Er leugnete aber und sprach
13. Aria: Ach, mein Sinn
14. Choral: Petrus, der nicht denkt zurück

Intermission

PART II

15. Choral: Christus, der uns selig macht
- 16a. Da führeten sie Jesum
- 16b. Chorus: Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter
- 16c. Da sprach Pilatus zu ihnen
- 16d. Chorus: Wir dürfen niemand töten
- 16e. Auf daß erfüllet würde das Wort
17. Choral: Ach großer König
- 18a. Da sprach Pilatus zu ihm
- 18b. Chorus: Nicht diesen, sondern Barrabam
- 18c. Barrabas aber war ein Mörder
19. Arioso: Betrachte, meine Seel
20. Aria: Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken
- 21a. Und die Kriegsknechte flochten eine Krone
- 21b. Chorus: Sei gegrüßet, lieber Jüdenkönig
- 21c. Und gaben ihm Bakenstreiche
- 21d. Chorus: Kreuzige, kreuzige
- 21e. Pilatus sprach zu ihnene
- 21f. Chorus: Wir haben ein Gesetz
- 21g. Da Pilatus das Wort hörete
22. Choral: Durch dein Gefängnis, Gottes Sohn
- 23a. Die Jüden aber schrieen und sprachen
- 23b. Chorus: Lässest du diesen los
- 23c. Da Pilatus das Wort hörrete
- 23d. Chorus: Weg, weg mit dem
- 23e. Spricht Pilatus zu ihnen
- 23f. Chorus: Wir haben keinen König
- 23g. Da überantwortete er ihn
24. Aria: Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen
- 25a. Allda kreuzigten sie ihn
- 25b. Chorus: Schreibe nicht: der Jüden König
- 25c. Pilatus antwortet
26. Choral: In meines Herzens Grunde
- 27a. Die Kriegsknechte aber

- 27b. Chorus: Lasset uns nicht zerteilen
- 27c. Auf daß erfüllet würde die Schrift
- 28. Choral: Er nahm alles wohl in acht
- 29. Und von Stund an nahm sie der Jünger
- 30. Aria: Es ist vollbracht
- 31. Und neiget das Haupt
- 32. Aria: Mein teurer Heiland, laß dich fragen
- 33. Und siehe da, der Vorhang im Tempel zerriß
- 34. Arioso: Mein Herz, indem die ganze Welt
- 35. Aria: Zerfließe, mein Herze
- 36. Die Juden aber, dieweil es der Rüsttag war
- 37. Choral: O hilf, Christe, Gottes Sohn
- 38. Darnach bat Pilatum Joseph von Arimathia
- 39. Chorus: Ruht wohl, ihr heiligen Gebeine
- 40. Choral: Ach Herr, laß dein lieb Engelein

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Born 21 March 1685 in Eisenach, Germany; died 28 July 1750 in Leipzig

The Passion According to St. John for Soloists, Chorus and Orchestra, BWV 245
(1723-1724)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Leipzig, 4 April 1724 (Good Friday); St. Nikolaus Church; Johann Sebastian Bach, director

THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE PSO PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 2 hours and 20 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 oboes d'amore, 2 oboes d'caccia, viola d'amore, viola da gamba, strings and continuo

The word "Passion" derives from the Latin "*patior*" — "*to undergo, to suffer*" — and was taken over into the Medieval vernacular and ecclesiastical languages to indicate the suffering and death of Christ on the cross; the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces its first known use in our language to the hoary date of 1175. Each of the four Evangelists left an account of Christ's crucifixion, and the rites of the early Roman Catholic Church provided that all be incorporated into the services during Holy Week. As preface to one of the two principal nodes of the Christian calendar, these pre-Easter observations formed an important focus of worship, and were distinguished by having the plainchants in which their texts were wrapped performed in a way that indicated the drama of the story: the words of Jesus were sung with a low, solemn tone; those of the narrating Evangelist in a medium voice at normal speed; and those of the crowd (known as the "*turba*") in a high, agitated manner.

The earliest polyphonic settings of the Passion texts date from 15th-century England, though only the *turba* sections and the speeches of individuals (John, Peter, Pilate, et al.) were multi-voice movements, the words of Jesus and the Evangelist remaining in plainchant. This type of "responsorial" Passion continued through the end of the 16th century, when it drew examples from Lassus, Victoria and Byrd. As a result of the Reformation, this hybrid plainchant/polyphonic form was taken over into the German vernacular in the middle of the 16th century, and remained a viable genre until the 1670s, when the great Heinrich Schütz composed three Passions in this manner on the words of Matthew, Luke and John, though he replaced the traditional chant melodies with ones of his own invention in a similar style. In a parallel development, composers in Italy and Flanders wrote through-composed "motet" Passions entirely in polyphony, often borrowing an old chant as a *cantus firmus* upon which to build their new composition. It was a short step from this variety of the form to the "oratorio" Passion which, beginning after the invention of opera in 1600, came to include the idioms of aria, recitative, ensemble and instrumental interlude. When taken over into Germany in the early 18th century, such works became

highly operatic in style and abandoned the traditional texts and music in favor of newly devised, sentimental verses tailored to the sometimes maudlin northern taste of the day. The best-known of these German literary retellings of the Passion story was that of Hamburg town councilor Barthold Heinrich Brockes, titled *Der für Sünden der Welt gemarterte und sterbende Jesus* ("Jesus Tortured and Dying for the Sins of the World"), which was set by Handel, Telemann, Mattheson, Keiser and others. Given the strong secular influences that had encroached upon the German Passion during the first decades of the 18th century, Johann Sebastian Bach's incomparable Passion settings represent a return to both the scriptural basis and the dignified style of earlier eras.

The fully polyphonic Passion was introduced into the liturgy of Leipzig as late as 1721, when the city's director of church music, its "Kantor," Johann Kuhnau, replaced the old plainchant Passion with a more modern specimen of the oratorio variety that he composed himself. The Passion in Leipzig was incorporated into the Vespers of Good Friday, and it marked the musical highpoint of the annual church calendar. This impressive service began at 1:15 p.m. with a congregational hymn on the subject of the crucifixion. The first part of the Passion music followed, then another hymn and the sermon, Part II of the Passion music, the motet *Ecce, Quomodo moritur* ("Behold How the Righteous Man Dies") by Jakobus Gallus, a versicle and a prayer, and the concluding hymn, *Nun danket alle Gott* ("Now Thank We All Our God"). Given the scale of the German Passion and the oratorical abilities of 18th-century Lutheran ministers, the service would rarely finish in less than four hours. The Good Friday worship was given in alternate years at the city's two main churches, St. Thomas and St. Nikolaus.

The necrology issued upon Johann Sebastian Bach's death in 1750 noted that he had composed five Passions. The *St. John* (1724) and *St. Matthew* (1729) survive complete, while the *St. Mark* exists only in the fragments that Bach excerpted from it for his 1727 *Trauer-Ode* ("Mourning Ode," a memorial for Queen Christiane Eberhardine, who renounced her claim to the throne of Poland rather than her Protestant beliefs); the *St. Luke* that has come down to us is apparently spurious, and the fifth Passion, perhaps composed when Bach was organist and music director at the court of Weimar from 1708 to 1717, has disappeared without trace. The *St. John Passion*, first presented at Leipzig's St. Nikolaus Church on Good Friday, April 7, 1724, occupies a significant place in Bach's life and work. He had assumed the duties of the city's Kantor the preceding May, after two more illustrious candidates, Georg Philipp Telemann and Gottlieb Graupner, had refused to accept the post, and he composed music with staggering prolificacy in the months following his appointment — a new cantata every week for two years, a Magnificat, a motet, a Sanctus, numerous organ works. The *St. John Passion* was his first contribution to the venerated Holy Week services. Though no contemporary reports survive concerning the reception of this musical epic at its first performance, it must have found favor — Bach remained Leipzig's Kantor until his death 26 years later. Bach revived the *St. John Passion* for Holy Week performances in 1725 and again around 1730 and in the late 1740s, each time with revisions of instrumentation and several substitute movements. The definitive score of the work that he prepared in 1749, at the end of his life, returned substantially to the original version of 1724. The *St. John Passion* fell into neglect when the elaborate Good Friday services in Leipzig were discontinued in 1766, and it was not heard again until 1833 in Berlin, four years after Felix Mendelssohn initiated the "Bach Revival" with his epochal performance of the *St. Matthew Passion*.

Bach assembled the text for the *St. John Passion* himself from three sources: the Bible, contemporary poetry reflecting on the events of the Evangelist's account, and Lutheran chorale hymns. The words for the Evangelist, for the crowd-chorus (which portrays variously the high priests, soldiers or Jews), and for Jesus and the other individual characters (Peter, Pilate, Maid, Servant) were taken from the Gospel of St. John (plus several lines from St. Matthew, since John does not mention the rent veil in the temple, the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints from the grave); the contemplative arias and choral numbers were the composer's reworkings of verses from the Passions by Brockes and J.G. Postel; the chorales were apparently of Bach's own choosing. Though its purpose was didactic and reverential, the *St. John Passion* is one of Bach's most dramatic works. Unlike the later *St. Matthew Passion*, the Evangelist in the *St. John Passion* becomes caught up in the unfolding story, his recitatives taking on a growing intensity that mirrors Jesus' plight. The chorus, in its dramatic function, participates directly in the action, shouting for crucifixion in the trial scene, demanding the release of Barabbas, or mocking Jesus on the cross as the self-proclaimed "King of the Jews." ("The choruses of the Jews in the *St. John Passion*," wrote Karl Geiringer in his study on the composer, "demonstrate a strangely wild, passionate and disturbing character. They produce a weird picture of human masses gone out of control.") Against this heated telling of the story, the choral movements, arias and chorales provide formal and stylistic balance while giving voice to the personal responses the Passion was expected to inspire in the Lutheran worshiper. In Bach's magnificent creation, however, the specifically dogmatic elements of the Passion are subsumed into a larger, universal expression, one not only of grief and tragedy, but one also of consolation and hope for the renewal of the human spirit. The *St. John Passion*

was written for one solemn day in the church calendar of a German Protestant town almost three centuries ago, but it continues to speak powerfully to all mankind.